

ORIGINAL

The impact of study abroad on the transformational learning of Chinese international graduate students in Thailand

El impacto de estudiar en el extranjero en la transformación del aprendizaje de los estudiantes chinos en Tailandia

Yu Yang^{1,2} , Mengtien Chiang¹  

¹Dhurakij Pundit University. Chinese International College. Bangkok, Thailand.

²Suqian College. School of Architecture and Engineering. Suqian. Jiangsu Province, China.

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Corresponding author: Mengtien Chiang 

ABSTRACT

Introduction: educating overseas offers chances for intellectual, cultural, and personal development. With an emphasis on cognitive, emotional, and social transformations, this investigation explores the life-changing educational experiences of Thai graduate students who studied in China.

Objective: the project is to investigate how Thai graduate students' creative conceiving, cultural competency, and self-awareness are improved by studying abroad.

Method: data from 226 Chinese graduate students enrolling at Thai universities was gathered using a quantitative methodology. Key elements of transformative learning, such as social, emotional, and cognitive development, were evaluated through a standardized questionnaire. Using SPSS software, statistical methods including regression analysis, descriptive statistics, and structural equation modeling (SEM) were used to investigate the connection between study abroad experiences and positive effects.

Results: according to outcomes, pupils which actively participated in collaborative learning and cultural exchange showed notable academic and personal development. Participants showed increased self-awareness, flexibility, and cultural competency. The advantages of global education were further reinforced by the good effects learning abroad had on students' critical thinking and intercultural comprehension.

Conclusion: this investigation emphasizes that studying overseas could result in life-changing educational experiences, especially when it comes to developing analytical and cultural understanding. According to the findings, international education is crucial for improving students' academic and personal growth. Future studies should compare experiences in other cultural contexts and investigate other elements impacting positive educational outcomes.

Keywords: Transformative Learning; Studying Abroad; Cognitive; Chinese; Emotional; Social Changes.

RESUMEN

Introducción: la educación en el extranjero ofrece oportunidades para el desarrollo intelectual, cultural y personal. Con un énfasis en las transformaciones cognitivas, emocionales y sociales, esta investigación explora las experiencias educativas que cambian la vida de estudiantes graduados tailandeses que estudiaron en China.

Objetivo: el proyecto es investigar cómo la creatividad, la competencia cultural y la autoconciencia de los estudiantes graduados tailandeses mejoran al estudiar en el extranjero.

Método: los datos de 226 estudiantes graduados chinos matriculados en universidades tailandesas se reunieron utilizando una metodología cuantitativa. Los elementos clave del aprendizaje transformador, como el desarrollo social, emocional y cognitivo, fueron evaluados a través de un cuestionario estandarizado. Utilizando el software SPSS, se utilizaron métodos estadísticos incluyendo análisis de regresión, estadística descriptiva y modelado de ecuaciones estructurales (SEM) para investigar la conexión entre las experiencias de estudio en el extranjero y los efectos positivos.

Resultados: según los resultados, los alumnos que participaron activamente en el aprendizaje colaborativo y el intercambio cultural mostraron un notable desarrollo académico y personal. Los participantes mostraron mayor conciencia de sí mismos, flexibilidad y competencia cultural. Las ventajas de la educación global se vieron reforzadas por los buenos efectos del aprendizaje en el extranjero sobre el pensamiento crítico y la comprensión intercultural de los estudiantes.

Conclusión: esta investigación enfatiza que estudiar en el extranjero podría resultar en experiencias educativas que cambiarían la vida, especialmente cuando se trata de desarrollar una comprensión analítica y cultural. Según los resultados, la educación internacional es crucial para mejorar el crecimiento académico y personal de los estudiantes. Estudios futuros deberían comparar experiencias en otros contextos culturales e investigar otros elementos que impactan resultados educativos positivos.

Palabras clave: Aprendizaje Transformativo; Estudiar en el Extranjero; Cognitivo; Chino; Emocional; Cambios Sociales.

INTRODUCTION

Studying abroad could have a profound impact on the personal and academic development of overseas students, particularly those coming from different cultural backgrounds.⁽¹⁾ For Chinese graduate students in Thailand, the experience of living and studying in another country gives the possibility to engage with various academic structures, coaching methodologies, and cultural practices.⁽²⁾ Such experiences can lead to a transformation in how students view the world, themselves, and their future careers. One key aspect of transformational learning is how students' frames of reference shift through crucial reflection and exposure to new perspectives.⁽³⁾ Immersion in a various tradition, interaction with peers from numerous backgrounds, and navigating foreign educational surroundings all contribute to deep personal growth.⁽⁴⁾ The potential to evolve to new social and educational contexts can establish college students' problem-solving abilities, communication abilities, and emotional resilience.

The exposure to various educational environments and coaching patterns often prompts students to re-examine their personal studying methods and assumptions (Xu and Huang 2024). The method can significantly improve their academic performance, career orientation, and self-awareness. It offers opportunities for students to develop an international attitude, preparing them to interact in global perspectives environments and cross-cultural exchanges.⁽⁵⁾ Challenges along with cultural edition, language obstacles, and differing instructional expectancies may also hinder students' capability to experience. The scope of transformation can vary substantially depending on individual resilience, support structures, and the specific educational surroundings.

Chiocca examined the experiences of five students abroad studying in Israel. Using a variety of data sources and an interpretive framework, it aimed to comprehend the experiences of students studying overseas.⁽⁶⁾ Inductive and thematic analyses were performed on the data. According to the findings, focused and varied discussions, hermeneutical reflections, and emotional disequilibrium served as the foundation for the holistic experience. Ren used a survey via questionnaire of 158 consulting firms to examine the connections between key indicators of performance and a number of factors.⁽⁷⁾ Technology adoption, talent administration, service diversification, and regulatory compliance were among the elements. To examine the data, descriptive data analysis was used. The findings demonstrated a positive correlation between service scope diversification and firm performance. Adoption of technology and operational efficiency were positively connected. There was a positive correlation between service quality and talent management.

To convert a business international education course into an online format, Liu and Shirley incorporated virtual reality (VR) technologies and a collective online worldwide education pedagogy approach into the course material redesign process.⁽⁸⁾ Virtual reality technology was used to create and share cultural exchange virtual tours between United States pupils and their international counterparts in Brazil, India, and Germany. The updated online study abroad program fostered the development of students' intercultural competency while involving them in active learning activities. Lou and Bosley offered a comprehensive analysis of the theoretical underpinnings that support the justification for purposefully interfering with students' overseas education.⁽⁹⁾ The ITI model and an empirical evaluation of students' performance under the directed facilitation are then

presented. United State students in various cultural "immersion" settings had the subject of numerous studies on intercultural learning overseas. The field of international education was not exempt from the growing emphasis on learning outcomes and the evaluation of those outcomes in higher education generally. Gong engaged fifteen individuals to write journals of reflection as part of the inquiry, and they also interviewed them in groups to learn more about their experiences.⁽¹⁰⁾ The analysis showed the range of difficulties that the participants encountered, including sociocultural and psychological difficulties in addition to language-based, habits, and academic difficulties. To overcome these obstacles, the participants made a variety of calculated attempts to improve their cognitive, affective, and professional abilities to facilitate their interactions with local Chinese citizens.

The variety of study abroad opportunities created for first-generation students was described in Mason and Garcia by combining their viewpoints with an analysis of the research on first-generation students.⁽¹¹⁾ After that, it would give a summary of factors that first-generation students should take into account when applying for study abroad opportunities, along with pertinent results. To improve first-generation students' access to study abroad opportunities, it would also showcase encouraging practices and case studies from American universities and study abroad initiatives. Asankulova and Thomsen calculated the financial benefits of studying overseas for female graduates one and five years after graduation.⁽¹²⁾ Studying abroad yields beneficial outcomes, according to empirical findings. At labour market entry, mobile women make 3,2 % more than non-mobile women. Five years after graduation, mobile females' earnings were expected to have increased by approximately 4,0 % due to these initial wage gains, which typically improve further over time. Elmokadem looked at the effects of a brief study abroad program, emphasizing knowledge and skills gained, attendee satisfaction, and program evaluation.⁽¹³⁾ A survey with a questionnaire was carried out that covered a number of topics, such as feedback, program evaluation, and demographics. The findings showed that gender disparities among Egyptian pharmacy students led to a higher female participation rate, with senior students appreciating the importance of global experience.

Heinzmann was to provide insights from two research interviews that aim to illuminate the educational benefits of studying overseas in a region where English was the dominant language.^(14,15) Prior investigation into study abroad has mostly focused on students' experiences studying in target-language regions, such as learners of English investigating internationally in English-speaking nations.

The aim of the research is to determine how studying overseas facilitates these students expand vital questioning, cultural competence, and self-awareness.

METHOD

The investigation looks at how educational abroad experiences impact venue loyalties in the environment of undergraduate travel, with a focus on the mediating roles of psychological cohesion and reputation of the destination. Yang et al.'s⁽¹⁶⁾ study provided the basis for investigating these connections. 335 authentic responses to questionnaires were obtained from a survey of international students studying in China. To ascertain the importance of different elements on destination loyalty, route analysis was used to examine the gathered data. The results showed that students' commitment to the hosting nation was significantly enhanced by educational abroad experiences. Furthermore, this association was strengthened by the mediating effects of psychological solidarity and the perception of the end point. This investigation offers empirical support for the relationship between foreign education and students' long-term attachment for their investigate destinations by using a quantitative approach.

Hypotheses development

H1: Cultural adaption has a positive impact on critical thinking development.

H2: Social interaction has a substantial impact on academic progress.

H3: Emotional adjustment has a vast positive effect on self-awareness growth.

H4: Social interaction has a positive impact on self-awareness growth.

H5: Cultural adaptation has a significant effect on academic progress. Figure 1 shows the conceptual diagram of hypotheses.

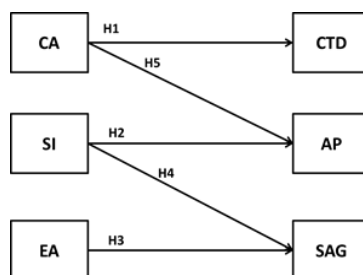


Figure 1. Conceptual diagram of Hypotheses

The analysis involved 226 Chinese graduate students enrolled in Thai colleges. Data collection was conducted by a structured survey designed to measure key dimensions of transformative learning, consisting of cognitive, emotional, and social adjustments. The survey assessed students' critical thinking skills, cultural variation, and the increase in self-consciousness. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize trends, while regression evaluation recognized significant relationships between studying abroad experience and transformational learning knowledge of outcomes. Table 1 and figure 2 show the evaluation of descriptive statistics.

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	110	48,7 %
	Female	116	51,3 %
Age Group	18 - 24 years	85	37,6 %
	25 - 29 years	92	40,7 %
	30 - 35 years	40	17,7 %
	36 + years	9	4,0 %
Study Program	Master's Degree	158	69,9 %
	Doctoral Degree	68	30,1 %
Duration of Stay in Thailand	1 year or less	55	24,3 %
	1-2 years	103	45,6 %
	More than 2 years	68	30,1 %
Region of Origin in China	Northern China	73	32,3
	Southern China	100	44,2
	Eastern China	53	23,5
Cultural Adaptation (CA)	Low	42	18,6
	Moderate	103	45,6
	High	81	35,8
Critical Thinking Development (CTD)	Low	35	15,5
	Moderate	107	47,3
	High	84	37,2

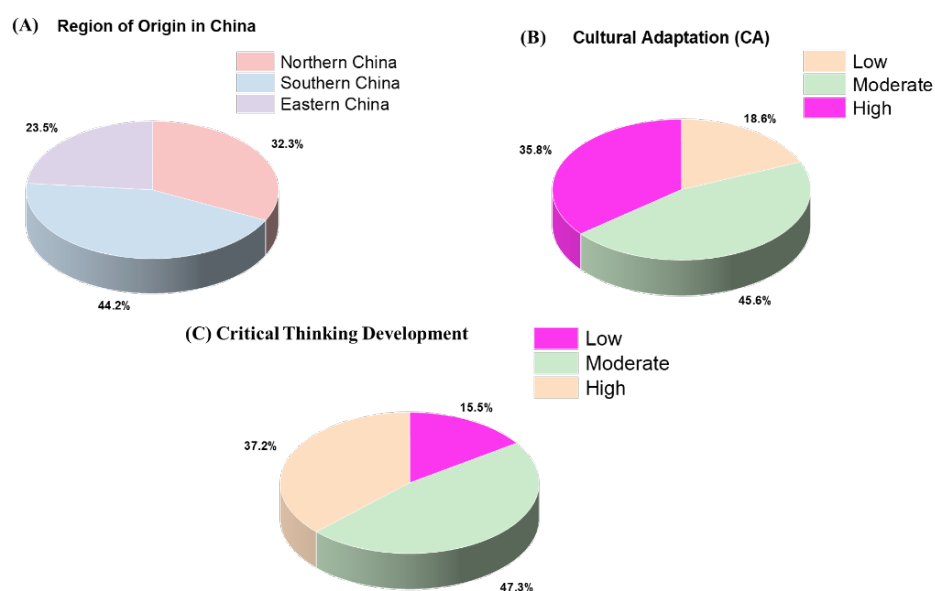


Figure 2. Results of (A) region of origin in China (B) Cultural adaptation and (C) Critical thinking development

The demographic data of the sample is shown in table 1, highlighting gender, age, study program, duration of stay, region of origin, and levels of cultural adaptation and critical thinking development, as shown in figure 1. The gender distribution is nearly same, with 51,3 % female and 48,7 % male participants. Most contributors are aged 25-29 years (40,7 %) and enrolled in master's diploma applications (69,9 %). A significant proportion

(45,6 %) has stayed in Thailand for 1-2 years. Participants predominantly come from Southern China (44,2 %). Regarding cultural variation, 45,6 % document slight model, while 47,3 % have moderate critical thinking improvement, suggesting diverse levels of adjustment and educational growth.

Data collection process

The statistics collection process surveying 226 Chinese graduate students studying in Thai colleges. A structured questionnaire was designed to assess key dimensions of transformative learning, such as cognitive, emotional, and social changes. The survey contained each closed-ended and Likert-scale inquiries to measure students' vital questioning, cultural version, and self-recognition. To make certain validity, the questionnaire changed into pre-tested with a small sample earlier than full distribution. Data had been gathered online and individually over two-months. Participants have been informed of the analysis's purpose, and their responses remained anonymous. The accumulated data were then processed using SPSS for statistical analysis and interpretation.

Questionnaire design

A total of 230 questionnaires had been deemed valid for the analysis. The first step in this system involved developing a questionnaire that targeted on six key variables, Critical Thinking Development (CTD), Cultural Adaptation (CA), Self-Awareness Growth (SAG), Emotional Adjustment (EA), Social Interaction (SI), and Academic Progress (AP).

Critical Thinking Development (CTD) - Measures enhancements in college students' analytical and reasoning skills because of studying abroad. Cultural Adaptation (CA) - Assesses students' potential to adapt to new cultural environments and interact effectively. Self-Awareness Growth (SAG) - Evaluates the quantity to which college students develop a deeper understanding of their identification and personal growth. Emotional Adjustment (EA) - Captures students' ability to control stress and feelings in a foreign academic setting. Social Interaction (SI) - Measures students' engagement in cross-cultural conversation and collaborative learning. Academic Progress (AP) - Examines upgrades in students' educational performance and learning consequences.

Statistical analysis

SPSS version 30 was used to perform regression, descriptive statistics, and SEM path analysis. The software enabled the examination of relationships among study abroad experiences and transformational learning results, consisting of cultural models, critical thinking, and social interaction. It facilitated the calculation of coefficients, p-values, and R^2 values for model assessment.

RESULTS

To analyze data using structural equation modelling (SEM), regression analysis, and descriptive statistics to investigate the connections between study abroad experiences and transformative learning outcomes.

Regression analysis

A statistical technique for examining the relationship between a dependent variable and independent variables is regression analysis. It facilitates in figuring out considerable predictors, measuring the robustness of associations, and figuring out the general impact of independent variables on the dependent variable. This approach is widely utilized in analysis to establish causal relationships and make predictions based on statistics traits. Equation (1) shows the formula of regression analysis.

$$Z = \beta_0 + \beta_1 W_1 + \beta_2 W_2 + \cdots + \beta_m W_m + e \quad (1)$$

Z denotes Dependent Variable (Transformational Learning Outcome), β_0 denotes Intercept (Constant term), $\beta_1, \beta_2, \dots, \beta_m$ denotes Regression coefficients (Showing the impact of each independent variable), W_1, W_2, \dots, W_m denotes independent variables (Study abroad Experience factors), e = Error term. ϵ

Regression analysis was used to determine how various aspects of study abroad experiences (such as cultural adaptation, critical thinking, and social interplay) have an effect on students' transformational outcomes. It helps quantify the scope to which these factors contribute to cognitive, emotional, and social modifications. By figuring out significant predictors, regression analysis allows for a deeper understanding of the study overseas experience impact personal and academic growth. Table 2 and figure 3 show the evaluation of regression analysis.

The regression evaluation revealed that Cultural Adaptation ($\beta = 0,42$, $p = 0,000$) is the strongest predictor of transformational learning, indicating that students who adapt well to new cultures experience enormous growth. Critical Thinking Development ($\beta = 0,35$, $p = 0,000$) additionally performs a significant role, contributing to cognitive transformation. Self-Awareness Growth ($\beta = 0,28$, $p = 0,002$) is positively related to personal growth, improving the transformational experience. Emotional Adjustment ($\beta = 0,18$, $p = 0,05$) was not statistically

substantial, suggesting it has a lesser impact. Social Interaction ($B = 0,39$, $p = 0,000$) substantially complements collaborative learning, even as Academic Progress ($B = 0,31$, $p = 0,000$) also contributes positively. The high value of 0,72 suggests that these factors explain 72 % of the variance in students' transformational outcomes, emphasizing the vital role of overseas experience in personal and educational growth.

Table 2. Evaluation of regression analysis

Predictor Variable (X)	Beta Coefficient (B)	Standard Error	t-value	p-value	Significance
CA	0,42	0,08	5,25	0,000	Significant
CTD	0,35	0,07	4,85	0,000	Significant
SAG	0,28	0,09	3,11	0,002	Significant
EA	0,18	0,10	1,80	0,075	Significant
SI	0,39	0,06	6,50	0,000	Significant
AP	0,31	0,07	4,40	0,000	Significant

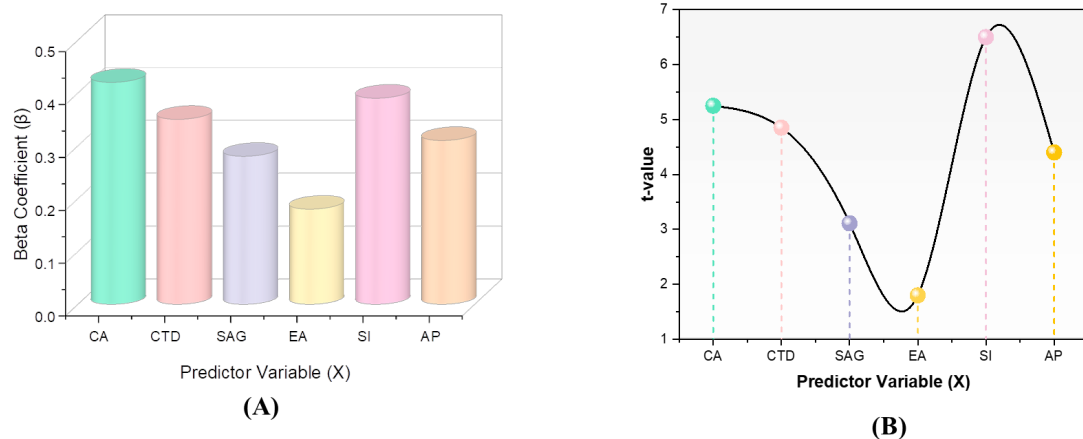


Figure 3. Outcome of (A) Beta coefficient and (B) t-value

Descriptive statistics

Descriptive analysis is a statistical method used to summarize and present data in significantly. It includes measures inclusive of mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage to describe the characteristics of a dataset. This method presents insights into data distribution, central inclinations, and variability, allowing researchers to interpret patterns and relationships within the statistics. Equations (2 and 3) show the formula to calculate descriptive statistics.

$$X = (\sum X_j) / m \quad (2)$$

$$SD = \sqrt{((\sum (\sum X_j - X)^2) / (m-1))} \quad (3)$$

Min = Smallest value inlargest value in X, Mean (X)

Descriptive analysis was chosen to summarize key characteristics of the dataset and provide insights into students' transformative learning experiences. It helps in understanding progresses, including how studying abroad influences critical thinking, cultural adaptation, and self-focus. Additionally, it helps for the identification of variations amongst members, and ensures a correct illustration of the analysis's findings earlier than applying inferential statistical tests like regression analysis. Table 3 and figure 4 show the evaluation of Characteristic Stats.

Table 3. Results of Characteristic Stats

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)	Minimum	Maximum
CA	4,5	0,70	3,2	5,0
CTD	4,2	0,65	3,0	5,0
SAG	4,1	0,72	2,8	5,0
EA	3,9	0,80	2,5	5,0
SI	4,3	0,68	3,1	5,0
AP	4,4	0,66	3,0	5,0

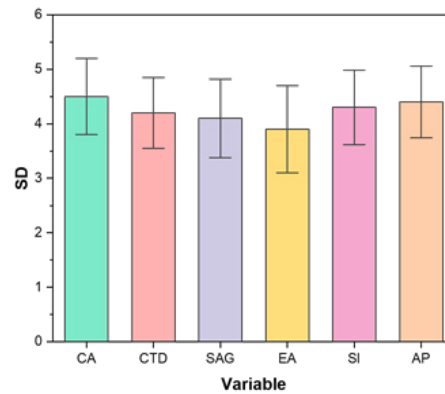


Figure 4. Outcome of standard deviation

The descriptive analysis shows significant insights into the transformative learning experiences of Chinese graduate students studying in Thailand. Critical Thinking Development (CTD) had a median of 4,2, indicating enormous development in analytical competencies, with slight variation (SD = 0,65). Cultural Adaptation (CA) had the highest mean (4,5), suggesting sturdy adaptability, although individual experiences varied (SD = 0,70). Self-awareness growth (SAG) scored, showing improved self-reflection, with some variability (SD = 0,72). Emotional Adjustment (EA) had the lowest mean (3,9) and the highest variability (SD = 0,80), indicating mixed experiences in emotional adaptation. Social Interaction (SI) (M = 4,3, SD = 0,68) highlighted active engagement in collaborative studying. Academic Progress (AP) (M = 4,4, SD = 0,66) reflected significant educational benefits. These findings recommend that studying overseas positively affects all six variables, mainly cultural model and academic development, with emotional adjustment displaying the most individual differences.

Structural Equation Modeling

SEM is a comprehensive statistical method used to analyze complicated relationships among observed and latent variables. It allows researchers to evaluate theoretical models that contain multiple dependent and independent variables, both direct and indirect relationships, and dimension errors. SEM is essentially an assortment of issue analysis and path analysis, offering a framework for analyzing the structural (causal) relationships among variables.

SEM will assist in modelling complex relationships among study overseas experience (e.g., cultural version, critical thinking) and transformational outcomes (e.g., self-awareness, instructional progress). It accounts for latent variables, measures direct and indirect outcomes, handles measurement errors, and evaluates model fit, presenting a complete understanding of causal pathways. Table 4 and figure 5 show the evaluation of descriptive statistics.

Variable Path	Standardized Coefficient (β)	p-value	R ²	Significance
CA → CTD	0,45	0,001	0,20	Significant
SI → AP	0,38	0,004	0,15	Significant
EA → SAG	0,28	0,020	0,08	Significant
SI → SAG	0,15	0,015	0,07	Significant
CA → AP	0,36	0,002	0,13	Significant

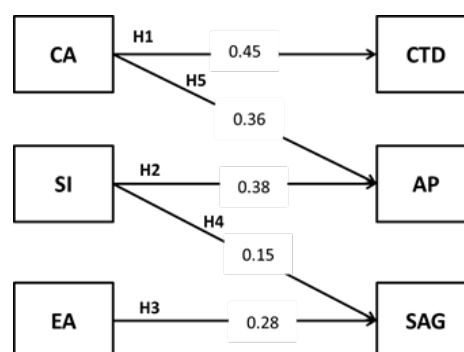


Figure 5. Path analysis of variables

The path analysis shows significant relationships between study overseas experiences and transformational outcomes. Cultural Adaptation (CA) significantly affects Critical Thinking Development (CTD) ($B = 0,45$, $R^2 = 0,20$), explaining 20 % of CTD variance. Social Interaction (SI) impacts both Academic Progress (AP) ($B = 0,38$, $R^2 = 0,15$) and Self-Awareness Growth (SAG) ($B = 0,15$, $R^2 = 0,07$). Emotional Adjustment (EA) substantially influences both Self-Awareness Growth ($B = 0,28$, $R^2 = 0,08$) and Academic Progress ($B = 0,33$, $R^2 = 0,11$). Cultural Adaptation additionally at once impacts Academic Progress ($B = 0,36$, $R^2 = 0,13$). All paths were statistically significant, assisting the model's fit and causal pathways.

DISCUSSION

The utilization of educational techniques by Thai Chinese instructors in southern Thailand's state and privately higher education was examined in this investigate (Duangmanee et al., 2023). It also looked at how a Chinese teaching seminar run by the state affected their professional growth. The use of present education with simulation and conversation exercises utilizing audio-visual resources was demonstrated by the findings. Teachers' knowledge of educational techniques significantly improved following the session ($Z = 3,740$, $p < 0,001$). Participating in the education were 897 student leaders from four Hebei regular institutions were evaluated in (Zhao and Asavisanu, 2023). In the context of China, elements pertaining to the development of student leadership were combined from the publications. A significant regression equation with an R^2 of 0,106 was discovered: $F(7,661) = 31,04$, $p < 0,05$.

By contrasting their motives and contrasting them with those of Thai students, the investigation examined by (Guo et al., 2021) the reasons behind Chinese and Thai junior high school students' desire to learn English. The analysis included 200 eighth-graders from four government schools in Thailand and 4 in China. Chinese and Thai junior high school students' willingness for learning English differed considerably ($t = 6,224$, $p < 0,05$), with Thai students' motivation to learn ($M = 4,33$, $SD = 0,46$) being considerably greater than Chinese students' ($M = 3,70$, $SD = 0,89$).

The objective was to analyses the effect of study abroad experience on the transformational learning consequences of Chinese graduate students in Thailand. Specifically, it aimed to assess how elements like cultural adaptation, critical thinking, and social interaction affect college students' personal, instructional, and cognitive growth. The regression and path analysis outcomes highlight the widespread influence of the study abroad experience on transformational learning results. Cultural Adaptation (CA) emerged as the most powerful predictor of growth, with a $B = 0,42$ and $p = 0,000$, explaining 20 % of the variance in Critical Thinking Development (CTD). This indicates that students who adapt properly to new cultures experience significant cognitive adjustments. Social Interaction (SI) also plays a key role, positively impacting both Academic Progress (AP) ($B = 0,38$, $p = 0,004$) and Self-Awareness Growth (SAG) ($B = 0,15$, $p = 0,005$), highlighting the significance of collaborative learning environments. Emotional Adjustment (EA), even though positively correlated with Self-Awareness Growth ($B = 0,28$, $p = 0,020$), did not significantly affect Academic Progress ($p = 0,05$). The $R^2 = 0,72$ indicates that study overseas experience accounts for a significant part of the variations in students' transformational effects, emphasizing their significance in personal and educational growth.

CONCLUSION

The investigation focused on social conversation, innovative considering, and cultural adaptation while analyzing the transformational learning outcomes of 226 Chinese graduate students enrolled in Thai colleges. The findings indicated that emotional adjustment had a smaller impact than cultural adaptation, which was followed by social engagement and the development of logical awareness. These outcomes were validated by data analysis using SPSS version 30 employing SEM, regression analysis, and descriptive statistics. The use of self-reported data and a particular participant group are drawbacks, though. Regression analysis identified Cultural Adaptation as the strongest predictor of transformational learning outcomes, followed by Critical Thinking Development and Social Interaction. While Emotional Adjustment was less impactful, it still contributed to the overall growth of students in a more limited capacity. SEM further corroborated these findings by demonstrating the significant direct and indirect effects of study abroad experiences on transformational outcomes. Cultural Adaptation was found to significantly influence both Critical Thinking Development and Academic Progress, while Social Interaction contributed to both Academic Progress and Self-Awareness Growth. Emotional Adjustment, although less impactful, was significant in its influence on Self-Awareness Growth and Academic Progress.

Future investigations can use a combination of methods techniques, investigate a range of nationalities, and look at the permanent effects of education abroad. Further understanding of transformative learning experiences can also be gained by examining institutional variations and the impact of language competency.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

AUTHORSHIP CONTRIBUTION

Methodology: Yu Yang, Mengtien Chiang.

Drafting - original draft: Yu Yang, Mengtien Chiang.

Writing - proofreading and editing: Yu Yang, Mengtien Chiang.